

OPENING STATEMENT

Ranking Member Eddie Bernice Johnson (D-TX)
Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

Full Committee Event
“Live from the International Space Station”

July 24, 2014

Thank you Mr. Chairman. I am looking forward to hearing from our astronauts today about life on the International Space Station and the challenges and opportunities they face. I hope that we can follow today’s event with a formal hearing at a later date that will allow a more comprehensive examination of the International Space Station and its utilization in support of exploration as well as for basic and applied research.

As you know, this past weekend marked the 45th anniversary of the first humans landing on the Moon. It was a bold achievement, as was the more recent assembly of the International Space Station. The success of both of these ventures depended on the dedication and bravery of past and present members of the astronaut corps in spite of the risks they willingly face in the name of science and exploration. I know that all Members join me in saluting them.

While the road to its completion was a long one, the ISS stands as one of the engineering marvels of the modern age, and a testament to American ingenuity and perseverance. In addition, the international partnership of the ISS has stood the test of time, providing a foundation for future long-term space partnerships.

The ISS has great inspirational value for our young people, as evidenced by the intense interest of our students in talking to the orbiting astronauts and in developing science projects that might fly on the Station.

Yet, the stark reality is that the ISS is a perishable commodity, and “the future is now” in terms of utilizing this unique facility. While I welcome the President’s proposal to extend ISS operations to at least 2024, we need to make sure that the years that are available are used effectively to answer the research and engineering questions that can only be answered on the ISS.

I would like to make one more point. If we want to ensure that the ISS carries out the needed research and technology activities in a timely and productive fashion, we have to be willing to make the needed investments.

The ISS research budget is stagnating, and the agency’s life and microgravity sciences budget has been cut deeply over the past decade. The appropriated funding for Biological and Physical research in FY 2014 accounts for less than 3 percent of total ISS funding. Clearly, this is a situation Congress can and must rectify.

In closing, I look forward to today's downlink and the opportunity to hear from our astronauts. Thank you, and I yield back the balance of my time.